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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Subject: "GOOD BUTTERMAKING AT HOME." Information from the Bureau of Dairy Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Butter is a "must" and not a "maybe" these days. But did you know in early times butter was considered a luxury - a special treat for rare occasions? It was ... and it was also considered a medicine. 'Butter a medicine - isn't that funny? But it's really no wonder because butter is one of the most valuable of foods. It helps people resist disease, gives them energy, and is fine to serve to growing youngsters. A good slogan might be "Butter with every meal" ... and butter with nearly every food. Butter is one of the few things that fit into every menu and ol and young alike enjoy.

It happens nowadays that most of the butter used in the United States is mad in creameries ... and that's the way it should be because creameries usually have better equipment for making uniformly good butter than individual families have. Still, a lot of folks - mostly farm families - make their own butter. For example, thousands of Farm Security families make their own butter as a part of their live-a home program. But they make it almost entirely for home use and try to follow the best methods.

Some people try to churn surplus cream on the farm, and sell the butter, but most find that selling butter isn't as good business as selling cream. As a matter of cold dollars and sense - s-e-n-s-e - cream brings more cash than homemade butter and is a lot less trouble and bother. Of course, the cream should be of first-rate quality and marketed often.

Now about the butter we make to use at home. We've said butter is good for us, but butter must be good to be good for us. And after the cow has done her part

it's our turn. Good butter depends primarily on good cream - and good cream should be "clean, cold, and fresh-flavored" ... from the cow to the churn.

Taking for granted we have some good "clean, cold, and fresh-flavored cream" - two or three days old - we are now about ready to churn. Of course, we can churn the cream either sweet or sour -- sour cream gives a more highly flavored butter, but butter made from sweet cream keeps better. If we "ripen" the cream, instead of churning it sweet, we should warm it up for 10 to 12 hours before churning. To do this, we put all the cream for churning together in one container, mix it thoroughly, and warm it up slowly to about 60° to 75° F. Stir often and be sure to keep the temperature up. You should really have a little dairy thermometer on hand ... one would be quite inexpensive and would really take the guesswork out of ripening and churning. Don't add any fresh cream after ripening begins.

Let the cream stand at the ripening temperature until it thickens and gets a sort of glossy look. It should get mildly sour. But don't let it get too sour because very sour cream gives butter an overripe flavor and prevents it from keeping well. When the cream develops a mild-acid flavor, cool it quickly to churning temperature. Churning temperature runs from about 52° to 60° F. in winter - though it varies in different sections of the country and for different seasons, and no hard and fast rule applies. Best test is a temperature that will bring the butter in 30 to 40 minutes.

Perhaps cool your cream for churning in a can set in cold water - and stir it occasionally. Don't ever put ice or cold water in cream to chill it ... and don't pour hot water in to warm it. Warm water in cream is apt to make butter brittle or of a grainy texture. If you want your butter to come nice and firm, always have the cream at the desired temperature before putting it in the churn and, if the cream has been cooled quickly from a high temperature - hold it after cooling for at least a couple of hours before churning.

Just a word about churning cream that hasn't been kept cold - some families, you know, don't have ice or refrigeration in summer. Well, their cream probably ripens all right without any special attention - it just ripens as it is set aside to save for churning. But try by all means to cool it some way to the right temperature when you're ready to churn, and also to churn often so the cream won't get old or stale.

As already said, don't plan to churn in less than half to three-quarters of an hour. There just aren't any short-cuts to good buttermaking. If your cream is too warm and the butter comes too quickly, the butter will be soft. That means the buttermilk won't drain out of the little butter particles and you can't wash the butter properly. Any condition that causes buttermilk to stay in the butter means your butter won't keep well. Cream that's too warm also makes butter that has a sor of weak, greasy body. Of course, you don't want your cream too cold either - becaus the butter may get stubborn and not come at all. So you see, churning is quite a job of skill after all ...

Before you actually churn you should first clean and scald your churn, then rinse and chill it thoroughly with cold water. Clean and scald - and rinse and chil the other articles you use too - like the butter paddle, ladle, bowl, printer, and so on, and then set them in cold water until you're ready to use them so the butter won't stick to them.

Next pour the cream into the churn. 'Better pour it in through a strainer to break up any lumps. You can make a good strainer from a double thickness of cheesecloth, or wire about 200 meshes to the inch. Some people also use perforated tin strainers. By all means, don't fill your churn too full. A third to a half full is about right. If you overfill the churn, the cream will foam up and maybe never make butter - at least not till you take some of the cream out and start over. The trouble with full churns is that the paddle or dasher can't stir and shake up the

cream enough to bring the butter.

Incidentally, when you've put the cream in the churn, it's time to add butter color if you use it - about 20 to 35 drops to a gallon of cream. Often in winter people like to add a little color because the cows are usually on dry feed then and butter comes rather colorless. Only in late spring and early summer or while cows are on pasture is butter likely to have a high natural color. In winter though, green feed such as oats, alfalfa and rye grass, help give butter a good natural color.

When you are ready to start churning, put the cover on tight, turn the churn a few times, and stop a minute to take off the lid and let the gas escape. Do this several times at first, or until all the gas escapes, and then get in action in earnest. Churning experts say, for the common barrel type churn, you should churn about 60 revolutions a minute - or one turn for every second. For the churn with a revolving dasher, about 70 to 100 turns of the handle per minute are right. Don't be too slow or you'll lenghten your churning time and not make as good butter.

How about timing yourself the next time you churn? See how many turns you make a minute, and also check the total time you churn. Maybe it'll make a rather monotonous job more interesting - trying the keep the turns about 60 to 100 a minute depending on the kind of churn you use. Reach the right tempo and then keep up an even, steady gait till you finish.

Are you sure you know when you've finished churning? Most people think they know but don't. You don't churn till you have big lumps and pieces of butter - no indeed! The time to stop is just when the butter comes in little pieces or granules about the size of grains of wheat. Butter "breaks" when the little bits of butter have separated from the cream and are firm yet aren't hard and brittle. This exact stage is when you can drain off the buttermilk best and wash your butter most thoroughly ...

Well, we don't like to "stop short" like this ... but more about washing and working butter another time.

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